

21/07/1997

Trans-Asia rail: Work grinds to a halt in Cambodia

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The consultants engaged by KTM Berhad to gather information on the Trans-Asia railway have been forced to stop work temporarily in Cambodia due to political uncertainties there.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said it was difficult for the consultants to proceed with the fact-finding work there because the country was in turmoil.

He was speaking after opening the Selangor MCA general assembly at Wisma MCA.

The Trans-Asia Railway will run from Singapore through Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Aranyaprathet, Poipet, Sisophon (all in Thailand), Phnom Penh and Lok Ninh (Cambodia), Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (Vietnam) to Kunming in China.

KTM Bhd is the project manager for the Trans-Asia Railway link.

The link, stretching 5,513 km, was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the fifth Asean Summit in Bangkok last December.

The Government appointed a consortium of consultants to conduct a feasibility study on the proposed Trans-Asia railway link last May.

The lead consultant is KL Consult, assisted by Universiti Malaya Inc. The team will conduct economic forecasting and sensitivity tests on the project. The other consultant is Zaaba Consultancy.

These consultants will conduct studies on three main areas - economic, forecasting, engineering studies and cross-border facilitation courses involving teaching and recruitment of security, Customs and immigration personnel.

"We hope the situation will return to normal soon so that the consultants can continue with their work," Dr Ling said.

He said the consultants had visited all the countries linked by the proposed project but had not compiled information on Cambodia.

The Malaysian Government has secured sufficient funding for the fact-gathering mission. Malaysia has allocated RM2 million for the initial feasibility study.

"We cannot do anything without having all information on the entire project.

"This is because a large section of the railway line passes through Cambodia," Dr Ling said.

All countries linked by the proposed project had agreed on their common border crossings last May.

On the Bukit Siput train-car crash which killed six members of a family last year, Dr Ling said he had approved a request from the investigating team for the appointment of a prosecutor from the private sector.

The probe by the investigating team, led by former Deputy Health Minister Datuk K. Pathmanaban, had to be postponed as they was no prosecutor available for the 35 witnesses.

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